



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

# Finance

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Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley  
Finance Committee Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy Hearing  
“The Benefits of Healthy Marriage”  
Wednesday, May 5, 2004

I am pleased to participate in this subcommittee hearing on “The Benefits of Healthy Marriage.” I am looking forward to hearing from our excellent witnesses. I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to be heard today to present your testimonies to the committee.

The case for strengthening healthy marriage is overwhelming and two facts related to marriage are indisputable. The first is that the number of single parent households are increasing. In 1960, less than 12 percent of children lived in single parent families. By 2000, that figure had more than doubled, rising to 27.6 percent. The second is that children in single families are poorer than children in two parent families. The poverty rate for all children in married couple families is 8.2 percent. The poverty rate for all children in single parent families is nearly four times higher at 35.2 percent.

As my colleagues know, last year the Senate Finance Committee favorably reported the welfare reauthorization bill, the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone – which I call the PRIDE bill. There are several provisions in the PRIDE bill which would give states incentives to develop programs that promote healthy marriages and strengthen families as well as provide the funds for research and technical advice for states on how to run successful family formation programs.

Now, let me be clear – the marriage promotion provisions in the PRIDE bill are not the Senate Finance Committee’s primary anti-poverty program. The increases in the work requirement and the state’s work participation rate are the PRIDE bill’s anti-poverty provisions. Work is the key to moving families out of poverty. If two married adults are both not working, the family’s income is still zero.

However, the effects of marriage on child poverty are compelling. A number of scholars have provided simulations of the effects on child poverty if marriage levels were raised to 1971 or 1960 levels. The results vary depending on the models and assumptions used, but generally speaking estimates range in a reduction of child poverty from 20 percent to 30 percent. If that is not an overwhelming reason to make marriage promotion a priority in a program that seeks to address child poverty, I don’t know what is.

The effects of marriage on a child's physical, emotional and academic well-being are also dramatic. A child living alone with a single mother is 14 times more likely to suffer serious physical abuse than is a child living with both biological parents who are married.

Children raised in single or broken families are more likely to become incarcerated as adults, compared to children raised in intact, married families. A child raised in a single household is more likely to be depressed, get expelled from school, repeat a grade in school and have developmental and behavior problems than a child in an intact married family.

There is also evidence indicating that there is higher likelihood of drug use among children in single households than there is among children in two-parent, married households. Now, does this mean that getting married is the answer for every single mother on welfare? Of course not.

Do marriage promotion programs effectively reduce dependence and foster a family's well-being? We don't know. There is a great deal of uncertainty around the effectiveness of marriage promotion programs. Is this a good reason to continue to do very little to encourage states to experiment with these programs? I do not think so.

When I drafted the PRIDE bill, I was not trying to create a "one size fits all" approach. What works for one family may not work for another. But just because one provision is not the best fit for every family doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to reach as many families as we can. There are families who could benefit from the activities authorized under Healthy Marriage Promotion provisions in PRIDE. We should encourage states to take a creative, innovative approach toward encouraging healthy marriages and family formation.

Marriage promotion is a key feature of welfare reform. I strongly believe that the provisions in the PRIDE bill will lead to increased understanding of the effectiveness of marriage promotion as well as contributing to improved child well being. I look forward to hearing from our panels of witnesses.